

# Opening Lecture

**Marc Henneaux**

In the name of the organizing committee, it is a great pleasure to welcome all of you to Claudio's Fest, a meeting in which we shall celebrate the scientific work accomplished so far by Claudio. It has become customary to choose the 60th birthday for such celebrations and we have followed the tradition, although we all know that a scientific career does not stop at 60 and that we shall therefore miss all the important scientific contributions that are still to come.

Your presence with us today is a clear homage that the international scientific community is paying to a great scientist. The meeting is organized by CECS, with support from the International Solvay Institutes, of which Claudio is an honorary member.

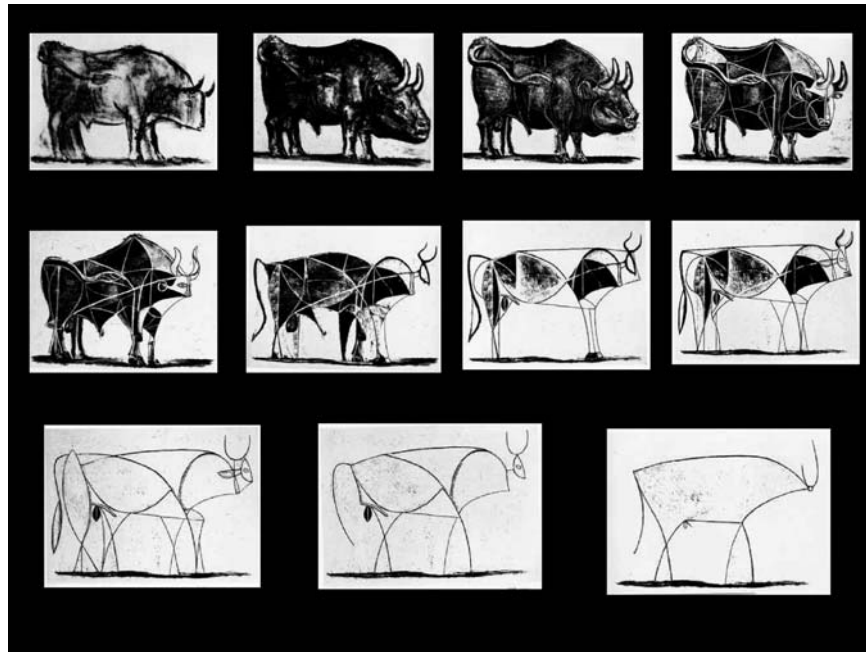
"Quantum Mechanics of Fundamental Systems: The Quest for Beauty and Simplicity" is the title that we have chosen for the conference. This is a wink to the early days of CECS, since the physics meetings organized by Claudio in Santiago in the 1980s, when the center was just created, were precisely entitled "Quantum Mechanics of Fundamental Systems." We hope that the present conference will carry the same pioneering spirit, the same freshness, the same driving enthusiasm as those heroic meetings and that we shall all remember it as one of these unusual conferences where something magic occurred.

To stimulate the discussions, we have invited more participants than speakers. This is also in perfect line with the philosophy of the CECS's early meetings where discussions were central. I would like to thank all the participants, speakers and non-speakers, for having accepted our invitation and for being with us to make this meeting a very special event indeed.

"The Quest for Beauty and Simplicity" are words that we added to the title of the original conferences in order to reflect Claudio's central inspiration in his research. Black holes, and in particular the black hole in three dimensions, as well as magnetic

---

M. Henneaux  
Université Libre de Bruxelles and International Solvay Institutes, ULB-Campus Plaine CP231,  
B-1050 Bruxelles, Belgium  
e-mail: [henneaux@ulb.ac.be](mailto:henneaux@ulb.ac.be)



**Fig. 1** The Quest for Beauty and Simplicity: Picasso's series of 11 drawings of a bull

monopoles, are for instance enigmatically beautiful, and presumably ultimately simple objects which have been recurrent themes in Claudio's investigations. The best illustration of this quest for beauty and simplicity is due to Claudio himself, who likes to show the famous series of 11 drawings of a bull due to Picasso to start some of his lectures (Fig. 1).

This is a physics conference. I believe, however, that it would be impossible to celebrate Claudio's 60th birthday without evoking his exceptional contribution to the development of science in Chile. When he decided more than 20 years ago to give up prestigious positions in the United States to come back to Chile and to build from scratch, without local support, a private research institute, I remember that many colleagues all over the world said that he was completely mad and that this enterprise was bound to fail. Time has shown that these pessimistic colleagues were wrong and that Claudio was right. CECS is in the world league of top research institutions and remarkably contributes to the international scientific visibility of Chile. If we are all here today in Chile, it is thanks to this most significant achievement.

I have known Claudio for almost 30 years now. What a long way since I arrived at Princeton in 1978 as a student! What started as a 1-year visit turned into a long-term collaboration. I think I am therefore in a good position to describe, in the name of Claudio's students and collaborators, his unique style of work that has deeply influenced us as physicists. This is not an easy exercise – to speak about a friend in his presence is never an easy exercise – but I'll try to do it. Perhaps the first lesson

that he taught us is that life is too short to lose one's time on marginal problems. One should develop a good scientific taste for what is relevant and important, even if this means not following fashion.

Another lesson is that doing research is – and should be – enjoyable. It is especially enjoyable when one tries to foresee and anticipate the implications of a plausible physics result before even attempting to prove it, trying to understand whether these implications make sense. Again, life is too short and educated guessing is the fastest – and funniest – way to go ahead.

Another unique aspect of Claudio's style of work is his ability to take advantage of any situation for doing physics. I am sure that all of us have on many occasions discussed physics with him in unthinkable circumstances, be it during a motorbike trip to a lost place in Texas to fetch an angora rabbit, or on a jeep ride on a bumpy dust road to Zapallar, or in a dentist waiting room, or at an airport counter waiting for the airline to accept sending with minimum extra charge oversized and overweight luggage, or even on a risky boat trip in the middle of the night in which we almost sank. Working with Claudio is indeed fun, but requires some capacity of adaptability from his collaborators, which is not part of the standard academic training.

I will not elaborate more now on Claudio's style and on the characteristics of his work – we are all here because we know them!

Before letting the fest begin, I would just like to add a few words in Spanish – this is a première.

Claudio, vengo a Chile desde hace más de veinte años y nunca he hablado español en público. ¡Tengo que empezar a hacerlo! No hay mejor oportunidad que hoy, en tu fiesta científica. Quiero añadir a lo que dije en inglés que hay otra cosa importante que aprendí de ti : es que debemos ser capaces de tomar riesgos, que pueden parecer a veces locos, no sólo riesgos en nuestras investigaciones sino también riesgos en la orientación de nuestra carrera, de nuestra profesión, quizás de nuestra vida. No es una cosa que se aprende en círculos académicos. Se puede aprender de exploradores, de poetas. Entonces voy a concluir con dos citas, la primera del explorador francés Paul-Emile Victor que organizó expediciones al Ártico y a la Antártica, y la segunda del poeta chileno Vicente Huidobro. Comienzo con Paul-Emile Victor : “La única cosa que estamos seguros de no lograr es la que no intentamos.” Y Huidobro : “Si yo no hiciera al menos una locura por ao, me volvería loco.” Eres un ferviente adepto de estos principios y has convertido con tu ejemplo a muchos de tus amigos.

And now, let the “fest” begin !

Quantum Mechanics of Fundamental Systems: The  
Quest for Beauty and Simplicity

Claudio Bunster Festschrift

Henneaux, M.; Zanelli, J. (Eds.)

2009, VI, 310 p. 10 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-387-87498-2